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U.S. Department of Transportation and *Consumer Reports* Launch Partnership to Fight Distracted Driving

New *CR* poll: Younger drivers more likely to text and drive, less likely to view as a danger
Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Consumers Union President Jim Guest unveil free guide for parents, teachers aimed at preventing teens from driving distracted

YONKERS, NY — The U.S. Department of Transportation and *Consumer Reports* today announced a new partnership to educate parents, teachers, and teens about the dangers of distracted driving. *Consumer Reports* released the results of a new poll that shows younger drivers are more likely to use handheld devices while driving — and less likely to view them as a danger.

Starting today, a free guide for parents and educators called “Distracted Driving Shatters Lives” is available at the Department of Transportation (DOT)’s web site <http://Distraction.gov> and at <http://www.consumerreports.org/distracted>. Copies will be distributed to schools and volunteer groups by the National School Safety Coalition. The DOT and *Consumer Reports* today are sending a public service announcement to TV stations nationwide, and the guide will be highlighted in a *Consumer Reports* video to air in retail stores across America in April, where it is expected to reach as many as 100 million people.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood joined Jim Guest, the president of Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of *Consumer Reports*, at the organization’s headquarters this morning to discuss the risks of distracted driving at a panel discussion by safety experts representing schools, families, and law enforcement. LaHood is the first member of a Presidential Cabinet to visit the *Consumer Reports* HQ in Yonkers, NY.

Secretary LaHood said, “Distracted driving has become a deadly epidemic on America’s roads, and teens are especially vulnerable because of their inexperience behind the wheel and, often, peer pressure,” Secretary LaHood said. “Behind the statistics are real families who have been devastated by these tragedies. We’re pleased to be working with *Consumer Reports* to raise awareness and help communities fight this problem.”

Guest said, “It only takes a moment of distraction to cause a tragedy. No text or call is worth a life. We know that educating people about the risk of distracted driving works. This partnership is devoted to spreading the word about the dangers of distracted driving and specific steps you can take to make a difference.”

A new, nationally representative survey by *Consumer Reports* National Research Center showed how widespread distracted driving is, especially among younger drivers:

- 63 percent of respondents under 30 years old reported using a handheld phone while driving in the past 30 days, and 30 percent of them texted while driving during the same period. That compares with 41 percent and 9 percent, respectively, of respondents who were 30 or older.
- Among the under-30 respondents, only 36 percent were very concerned about the problem of distracted driving, and only 30 percent felt it was very dangerous to use a handheld phone.
- 64 percent of respondents overall said they had seen other drivers texting using a handheld device in the past 30 days. 94 percent had observed drivers talking on a mobile phone and 58 percent had seen a dangerous driving situation related to a distracted driver in the past month.
- 78 percent of respondents overall said they had reduced or stopped behaviors related to distracted driving. Of that group, 66 percent said they did so because of reading or hearing about the dangers.

The survey was fielded in November 2010 with a total of 1026 respondents.

Secretary LaHood also unveiled the latest video in the Department of Transportation's "Faces of Distracted Driving" series today on Distraction.gov, featuring Miss South Dakota Loren Vaillancourt, who has been speaking to teens about the dangers of distracted driving since her brother was killed by a distracted driver in May 2009.

According to the Department of Transportation, nearly 5,500 people in the U.S. were killed and almost half a million were injured in accidents related to distracted driving in 2009. Eighteen percent of those fatal accidents involved the use of a cell phone.

The free brochure "Distracted Driving Shatters Lives" produced by DOT and *CR* recommends six steps for parents:

- Set a good example by putting down your phone while driving.
- Talk to your teen about the risks and responsibilities of driving and the danger of dividing their attention between a cell phone and the road.
- Establish ground rules for not texting or talking on a handheld device while behind the wheel.
- Have your child sign a pledge to not use a cell phone while driving, agreeing on penalties for violating the pledge.
- Educate yourself about the problem at Distracted.gov and ConsumerReports.org/Distracted.
- Spread the word by communicating with friends and family.

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